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STATE FOR AF/W AND NEA/MAG

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TAGS: PREL PINS PTER PHUM SNAR KDEM MR MO

SUBJECT: CDA HANKINS PROMOTES DEMOCRACY DURING MOROCCO  
STOP; GOM HIGHLIGHTS CONCERNS ABOUT NARCOTICS AND TERRORISM  
IN MAURITANIA

Classified By: CDA Robert P. Jackson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: U.S. Charge d'Affaires, a.i., in Nouakchott Dennis Hankins had productive consultations in Rabat on January 28 and 29. His most interesting exchange was with Director General of the external intelligence service Yassine Mansouri, who reiterated Moroccan concerns about stability and terrorism, and, for the first time, warned that Mauritania could become a narco-state like Guinea-Bissau. Hankins also met with former Moroccan Minister of Human Rights Mohamed Aujjar, who has attempted to mediate between General Abdel Aziz and President Abdallahi. Aujjar underscored the need for an outside mediator or facilitator to offer a transition plan that would be acceptable to the major players. Hankins also briefed diplomats from Canada, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK -- many of whom cover Mauritania from Morocco. End summary.

¶2. (S/NF) Director General for Studies and Documentation (DGED) Mansouri thanked Hankins, Charge Jackson and RAO Officer for the opportunity to exchange views on Mauritania. He insisted that Morocco was not supportive of the coup, but stability and counterterrorism remained paramount concerns. Mansouri indicated that Morocco is especially concerned by rising criminality in Mauritania. He said the Moroccan Government had warned Mauritanian counterparts about the terrorist threat years ago, adding that Mauritania has since become "the region's weak underbelly." Mansouri considered that President Abdallahi had been soft on radicalism that had, in part, emboldened AQIM.

¶3. (S/NF) Turning to the present situation, Mansouri said he thought a compromise was possible and that too much outside pressure could backfire. Morocco firmly supports a return to constitutionality, but Abdallahi had left General Aziz with no choice when he &blocked institutions from fulfilling their roles and pandered to Islamists.<sup>8</sup> Hankins responded that the USG firmly condemned the coup. He noted the U.S. and Mali have been the most forceful advocates for President Abdallahi's return. We support serious negotiations but based on the final exit of the military. He added that Col. Vall, the former head of state, was not an obvious savior given his record of corruption.

¶4. (C) Underscoring that the military has yet to consolidate the coup and faces a financial crisis in February or March when it likely will be unable to pay salaries, Hankins said coup opponents have grown stronger and more outspoken since the Estates General on Democracy. He noted that Abdallahi's recent policy statement shows a willingness not to complete his mandate if the military leave the field. He added that the June election proposed by the junta is not technically

feasible according to the UN. In fact, one cannot envision a fair election with General Aziz as a candidate.

¶15. (C) Hankins noted that many of Mauritania's fundamental challenges -- growing radicalism, the terrorist threat from Al-Qaeda in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and narcotics trafficking -- began during previous military regimes. While political machinations continue in Nouakchott, these problems are not being addressed. Nor is it likely that the type of &democratic transition<sup>8</sup> proposed by Aziz will effectively address these issues; on the contrary it is likely to aggravate them.

NARCOTICS

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¶16. (S/NF) Mansouri warned that drug trafficking from Guinea-Bissau and Senegal through Mauritania is becoming a preoccupation. While smuggling is not a new phenomenon, an unstable Mauritania could become another Guinea or Guinea-Bissau. In addition, countries with crumbling economies generate migrants, and Morocco and Spain had both received Mauritanian migrants in years past.

COUNTERTERRORISM

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¶17. (S/NF) In response to Charge Jackson's question about the terrorist threat, Mansouri's deputy counterterrorism oficer said that the Mauritanian Government had disrupted AQIM. However, AQIM is developing new tactics, including the use of snipers and car bombs. Moroever, there is a sort of competition between AQIM groups that could create a dangerous

dynamic. Mauritania is a country that could be destabilized by terrorist acts.

OUTSIDE HELP NEEDED

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¶18. (C) When Hankins and Jackson met with former Minister Aujjar on January 29, he explained that he had spent a week in November attempting to broker a compromise. He felt that the only way ahead at present was for a neutral mediator to offer a compromise that was palatable to all parties. He did not believe the French would be trusted by anyone as a mediator and suggested the U.S. play a role. He was sure Morocco would be willing to play a role but recognized they would not be seen as credible given the opposition view of Aziz as &the Moroccan.<sup>8</sup> One element of that could be Abdallahi's return for a short period, but a June election was not a solution.

COMMENT

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¶19. (C) Morocco's provision of counterterrorism and military assistance to the junta underscores GOM concern about what happens in Mauritania. The Moroccan line may have softened a bit since Secretary Rice's September visit to Rabat, perhaps out of recognition that Morocco cannot keep General Aziz afloat indefinitely. End comment.

¶110. (U) Charge Hankins has cleared this message.

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<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/rabat>  
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Jackson